Essays on Henry Sidgwick

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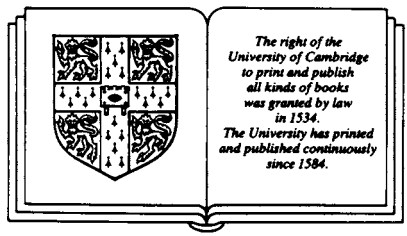

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Contents

Introduction
Henry Sidgwick today

BART SCHULTZ

1. Biography and reputation

Henry Sidgwick, who was born on May 31, 1838, and died on August 28, 1900, lived his entire life within the reign of Queen Victoria and his entire adult life within the confines of Cambridge University, ultimately achieving, in 1883, the status of Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy. Although he began his academic career as a classicist, by 1865 he was examining in philosophy and by 1867 teaching it; in the seventies he added political philosophy and political economy, and in the eighties law and legislation.

His career at Cambridge, where he was also educated – in significant measure through his membership in the discussion group the Apostles – suffered only one interruption, and this in 1869, when he resigned his fellowship because he could no longer in good conscience subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England as required. Such was Sidgwick's stature with his colleagues that his resignation was promptly met with the creation of a special position, one that did not require subscription, and thus his career continued apace, as did his tireless work in university politics and reform. In 1876 he married Eleanor Mildred ("Nora") Balfour, with whom he collaborated in a number of areas, but especially on psychical research and women's education. Henry was a founder and the first president of the Society for Psychical Research, and with Nora engaged in numerous investigations of mediums, psychics, ghosts, and so forth – his "ghostological studies." And together they helped found Newnham College (Cambridge's first college for women), of which Nora became the second principal. In university reform generally, he advocated such things as an increased emphasis on the sciences and modern literature and less emphasis on classics, as well as greater independence for philosophy and less reliance on lecturing, which he thought a relic from the days before printing.

Once, in a characteristic fit of despair over his writing, he remarked: "Still man must work – and a Professor must write books" (*M*, 481).

This he did, publishing during his lifetime *The Methods of Ethics* (1874), *The Principles of Political Economy* (1883), *Outlines of the History of Ethics for English Readers* (1886), *The Elements of Politics* (1891), and a collection of essays entitled *Practical Ethics* (1898), as well as countless reviews and essays ranging across endlessly diverse topics – Shakespeare, the poetry and prose of A. H. Clough, classical education, religious conformity, hallucinations, luxury, the trial scene in the *Iliad*, Tennyson, bimetallism, and Tocqueville, along with those previously mentioned and many more. Significantly, he published as a pamphlet his *Ethics of Conformity and Subscription* (1870), which gave the philosophical rationale behind his resignation from his lectureship.[1] Posthumously published were his *Philosophy, Its Scope and Relations: An Introductory Course of Lectures* (1902), *Lectures on the Ethics of T. H. Green, H. Spencer, and J. Martineau* (1902), *The Development of European Polity* (1903), *Miscellaneous Essays and Addresses* (1904), and *Lectures on the Philosophy of Kant and Other Philosophical Lectures and Essays* (1905). Sidgwick's *Memoir* (1906), compiled by his widow and brother, is composed mostly of extracts from his letters and journal.

His work, his character, and his life all testify to the accuracy of some lines that he borrowed for his self-assessment:

> Though without much fame, he had no envy. But he had a strong realism. He saw what it is considered cynical to see – the absurdities of many persons, the pomposities of many creeds, the splendid zeal with which missionaries rush on to teach what they do not know, the wonderful earnestness with which most incomplete solutions of the universe are thrust upon us as complete and satisfying. (*M*, 395)

Indeed, his character, which by all accounts was luminously fair and impartial, may have been his finest accomplishment, leading Brand Blanshard to write that Sidgwick was the nearest thing he knew to a "fully reasonable temper."[2] Arthur Balfour, his brother-in-law, wrote of him: "Of all the men I have known he was the readiest to consider every controversy and every controversialist on their merits. He never claimed authority; he never sought to impose his views; he never argued for victory; he never evaded an issue." Balfour adds: "Whether these are the qualities which best fit their possessor to found a 'school' may well be doubted" (*M*, 311). And as W. R. Sorley wrote, "his teaching was a training in the philosophical temper – in candor, self-criticism, and regard for truth."[3] He was, in sum, a philosopher notable for his sanity rather than his lunacy, his good will rather than his cantankerousness. Whether or not such a temper is paradigmatically philosophical, it has certainly always been a rare enough thing.

At this date, now within a decade of the centenary of his death, it is still safe to say that of all the great nineteenth-century utilitarians Sidgwick has suffered the most neglect. Although recent decades have seen some excellent studies of his ethical philosophy – the *Monist* symposium of 1974 and, most importantly, J. B. Schneewind's masterly *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy*[4] – the secondary literature on Sidgwick is quite sparse compared to that on Bentham and John Stuart Mill. And this is especially true of work on other aspects of Sidgwick's thought than the ethical philosophy embodied in his undisputed masterpiece, *The Methods of Ethics* (first published in 1874, seventh and last edition in 1907), for example, his views on the history of ethics, on political theory and political economy, on the scope and method of philosophy, and on the social sciences, not to mention his literary criticism, practical ethics and politics, theory of education, studies of Kant, and so on.

Thus, the object of this collection is not only to press forward with serious work on Sidgwick's ethical theory, coming to grips with Schneewind's work, the further development of Sidgwickian themes by John Rawls and Derek Parfit, and the continuing influence of *The Methods of Ethics* on the utilitarian program, but also to extend the scope of Sidgwick studies to get a better sense of his thought as a whole. Consequently, although the preponderance of the essays collected here are concerned with Sidgwick's ethics – and justifiably so, given the enduring value of his work on the subject – this volume also attempts a broader, indeed, more interdisciplinary, approach. In particular, it reflects a recognition of the importance of Sidgwick as a historian of ethics and classicist (see, especially, the essays by William Frankena, Marcus Singer, and T. H. Irwin) and as a political theorist and practical reformer (see the essays by Alan Donagan, Stefan Collini, and James Kloppenberg). To be sure, much remains to be done. Recovering the importance even of Sidgwick's second-most-important book, *The Elements of Politics* (1891), for his thought and times – it was required reading for the Cambridge political science exam through the late 1920s, Sidgwick being regarded as one of the masters of political science (not that one would have any inkling of this today) – is no small task and, indeed, has scarcely been broached, with the exception of the seminal work of Stefan Collini and James Kloppenberg.[5] And much the same could be said for most of Sidgwick's work, which recent decades have treated with a neglect that is baffling given Sidgwick's prominence during his lifetime, his importance as a scholar and academic discipline builder, and the degree to which his works continue to repay the effort (though the often dry and always undogmatic nature of his work undoubtedly explains some-

thing). This collection of essays will have achieved its purpose if it makes at least some progress in demonstrating the historical importance and continuing relevance of Sidgwick's work in these other areas, along with his profound accomplishments as an ethical theorist.

In the remainder of this introduction, I shall sketch some of the predominant themes of Sidgwick's work and its historical context and significance, explaining their bearing on the essays in this volume in particular and recent philosophical work in general. In doing this, I shall move back and forth across Richard Rorty's genres of rational reconstruction, historical reconstruction, and *Geistesgeschichte*, while trying not to lapse into doxography. But perhaps it should be stressed at the outset that this volume reflects the belief that it is important to understand philosophical works in their historical context, even if, as Schneewind remarks of *The Methods of Ethics*, the work is "the prototype of the modern treatment of moral philosophy" and "so modern in tone and content, and so lucid in style, that it has not seemed to call for any historical or exegetical study."[6] Indeed, Schneewind's book succeeds brilliantly in setting out the mid-Victorian filiations of Sidgwick's ethical work, and the article reprinted here (Chapter 2) encapsulates some of the crucial themes of his larger study.[7] And many of the pieces in the present volume, especially those by Singer, Donagan, Frankena, Irwin, Collini, and Kloppenberg, further develop the story. The others, those by J. L. Mackie, David Brink, Thomas Christiano, Nicholas White, John Deigh, and Russell Hardin, aim primarily at rational reconstruction, though they also frequently engage in historical reconstruction. The rather daunting job of *Geistesgeschichte* – canon building, history with a moral – may fall mainly to this introduction.

2. Moral theory: preliminaries

> The following incident relative to Professor Sidgwick's own view of his work is told me by Mr. Oscar Browning.
>
> Sidgwick had just completed his "Methods of Ethics." There lay the manuscript, accepted by Messrs. Macmillan. The author looking upon it said to Mr. Browning: "I have long wished and intended to write a work on Ethics. Now it is written. I have adhered to the plan I laid out for myself; its first word was to be 'Ethics,' its last word 'Failure.' "
>
> The word "Failure" disappeared from the second and succeeding editions, but I doubt whether Sidgwick ever acquired a faith in the possibility of a perfectly satisfactory ethical system.
>
> F. H. Hayward

> That was what was so remarkable in Henry Sidgwick – the perpetual hopefulness of his inquiry. He always seemed to expect that some new turn of argument, some new phase of thought, might arise and put a new aspect upon the intellectual scenery, or give a new weight in the balance of argument. There was in him an

> extraordinary belief in *following reason* – a belief and a hopefulness which continued up to the last.
>
> Canon Gore

Let me begin, in this and the next two sections, by giving a broad exegetical overview of Sidgwick's ethical position, with special reference to the interpretations of Schneewind, whose work is virtually canonical on many points, and of Rawls, whose appeal to Sidgwick has been influential, though controversial. Perhaps I should add that given the subtlety of Sidgwick's work, and the way in which he drew inspiration from a diversity of sources – Mill and Butler, Aristotle and Kant – it is often easy to sympathize with F. H. Hayward's somewhat exasperated comment that the "point upon which I would mainly insist is not that Sidgwick should be classified as this or that, but that it is extremely difficult to classify him at all."[8]

In his preface to the Hackett edition of the *The Methods of Ethics*, Rawls maintains that the book represents a twofold achievement. First, it is "the clearest and most accessible formulation" of classical utilitarianism, Sidgwick being "more aware than other classical authors of the many difficulties this doctrine faces" and attempting "to deal with them in a consistent and thorough way while never departing from the strict doctrine, as, for example, did J. S. Mill" (*ME*, Hackett ed., v). Second, the book is "the first truly academic work in moral philosophy which undertakes to provide a systematic comparative study of moral conceptions, starting with those which historically and by present assessment are the most significant," and Sidgwick's "originality consists in his conception of moral philosophy and of the way in which a reasoned and satisfactory justification of any particular moral conception must proceed from a full knowledge and systematic comparison of the more significant moral conceptions in the philosophical tradition" (*ME*, Hackett ed., v).

The connection between these two achievements might seem somewhat problematic, since the supposedly neutral and impartial position of the second could undercut any defense of a particular position such as utilitarianism. But as Schneewind, especially, has insisted, it is in fact "a mistake to view the book as primarily a defense of utilitarianism." In *The Methods of Ethics*, Sidgwick does work out a way of supporting utilitarianism and at times indicates that it is the best alternative, and it is clear from his other works that he was a utilitarian, but "it does not follow that the *Methods* itself should be taken simply as an argument for utilitarianism."[9] As Schneewind demonstrates in the essay reprinted herein, the book is in various respects a departure from classical utilitarianism, since it "centers on an examination of the accepted moral opinions and modes of thought of common sense," rejects empiricism and "dismisses the issue of determinism as irrelevant," tries to reconcile

utilitarianism with its traditional opponents, finds ethical egoism to be equally reasonable, and winds up arguing that, "because of this, no full reconciliation of the various rational methods for reaching moral decisions is possible and therefore that the realm of practical reason is probably incoherent."

As Schneewind goes on to argue, and as Singer also demonstrates in his erudite contribution to the present volume, Sidgwick shared a number of the assumptions and concerns of the philosophers whom he was most concerned to criticize – namely, the Cambridge moralists, figures such as F. D. Maurice, William Whewell, and John Grote, who represented the intuitionist alternative to utilitarianism, an alternative that, with Whewell in particular, involved a straitlaced endorsement of such traditional principles of duty as veracity, promise keeping, justice, and so on. Indeed, Sidgwick was an intuitionist, at least of a certain type,[10] and like the Cambridge moralists, he was, at least in part, examining morality in the hope of finding some support in it for religious views, for a belief in progress and moral freedom and insight that might call for a religious, preferably Christian, interpretation. This he did not find. In fact, on his analysis, the direction of moral development would seem to be positively at odds with a Christian interpretation, more utilitarian and less intentionalist, less concerned with the rightness of a "man's heart before God." In consequence it is not inaccurate to view *The Methods of Ethics* as containing "the negative results of a theological investigation" (Schneewind, Chapter 2, herein).

However, as all of these commentators emphasize, Sidgwick's investigation was anything but a piece of failed special pleading, theological or utilitarian. A fundamental point for Sidgwick, and one that is perhaps especially understandable in light of the tardy separation of philosophy and religion in the Cambridge curriculum and English academics generally, is "to put aside temporarily the urgent need which we all feel of finding and adopting the true method of determining what we ought to do; and to consider simply what conclusions will be reached if we start with certain ethical premises, and with what degree of certainty and precision" (*ME*, v). Sidgwick believed that the desire to edify had "impeded the real progress of ethical science," which would benefit from "the same disinterested curiosity to which we chiefly owe the great discoveries of physics" (*ME*, vi), and he repeatedly stressed that the reader should focus less on practical conclusions and more on the methods themselves. His object was "to expound as clearly and fully as my limits will allow the different methods of Ethics that I find implicit in our common moral reasoning; to point out their mutual relations; and where they seem to conflict, to define the issue as much as possible."

That is, the book is "an examination, at once expository and critical, of the different methods of obtaining reasoned convictions as to what ought to be done which are to be found – either explicit or implicit – in the moral consciousness of mankind generally: and which, from time to time, have been developed, either singly or in combination, by individual thinkers, and worked up into systems now historical" (*ME*, v).

Schneewind and Rawls are surely correct in holding that this is what gives Sidgwick's work much of its modern tone. Indeed, despite the intuitionism at work in Sidgwick's approach, he and Rawls have much in common on this score, especially since the tasks of clarification and systematic comparison form an important part of Rawls's method. As Rawls explains in "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," Sidgwick's "originality lies in his conception and mode of presentation of the subject and in his recognition of the significance of moral theory for moral philosophy."[11] "Moral theory," for Rawls, refers especially to substantive moral theory, as opposed to a metaethical concern with questions of moral language and justification, which he calls moral philosophy. As he observes in "The Independence of Moral Theory," it is "the study of how the basic notions of the right, the good, and moral worth may be arranged to form different moral structures," and it "tries to identify the chief similarities and differences between these structures and to characterize the way in which they are related to our moral sensibilities and natural attitudes, and to determine the conditions they must satisfy if they are to play their expected role in human life."[12] In such works as "Kantian Constructivism," and "The Independence of Moral Theory," Rawls has stressed the need to develop substantive moral theories in sufficient detail, and in systematic comparison with the alternatives, as a necessary preliminary to progress on metaethical problems; this endeavor, he urges, can be largely pursued independently of such areas as metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of language, which may well require progress in moral theory for their own advance. In this respect, Sidgwick and Rawls share, to a very considerable extent, a belief in the autonomy or independence of ethical theory from other parts of philosophy (and of course theology), as a field capable of progress on its own, a field in need of systematic theorizing.[13]

Sidgwick's construction of ethical theory on an independent basis, with non-ethical commitments – for example, theological or metaphysical – kept to a minimum, is evident in a number of areas.[14] He is not much concerned with the origin of the moral faculty or the object of moral knowledge, and he holds (against the Cambridge moralists) that the issue of free will versus determinism is largely irrelevant to moral issues. Perhaps most importantly, he maintains (with most of the Cam-

bridge moralists) that the basic concept of morality is unique and irreducible to any descriptive propositions derived from other disciplines. Morality is sui generis; it is a fundamental mistake to try to derive "ought" from "is."[15]

Indeed, according to Sidgwick, there is an absolutely simple, fundamental notion common to such ideas as "right" and "ought," one which "is too elementary to admit of any formal definition" (*ME*, 32). This notion is distinct from factual or descriptive notions, simple and undefinable, and yet precisely the thing that makes the propositions in which it figures a matter for rational consideration. Though the basic notion cannot be reduced to any simpler notion, it can be "exhibited" in various ways, by setting out its relations to other notions. As Schneewind puts it, the basic notion is, "roughly, the notion of a demand made by reason on action, or, more generally, the notion of a requirement which our own rationality presents to our desires and volitions."[16] Thus "right" acts are objectively so, not because such acts have some sort of property but precisely because right acts are rational – they simply are what we have most reason to do. Reason, on Sidgwick's view, is certainly not inert. And as John Deigh shows in his careful analysis and critique of the introspective and common-sense method by which Sidgwick arrives at this view, Sidgwick holds that we are all familiar with this basic notion, if only from the experience of goading ourselves to be rational in pursuing our own greatest (individual) good.

This side of Sidgwick's view certainly struck a number of his contemporary critical commentators as one of the things that set him apart from the earlier utilitarians and as perhaps a result of his (at the time unusual) fluency in German philosophy. Thus, in his response to the criticisms of Sidgwick's student, E. E. Constance Jones, Hayward maintained (with some hyperbole) that

> Sidgwick's identification of "Right" with "Reasonable" and "Objective"; his view of Rightness as an "ultimate and unanalysable notion" (however connected subsequently with Hedonism); and his admission that Reason is, in a sense, a motive to the will, are due to the more or less "unconscious" influence of Kant. Miss Jones appears to think that these are the common-places of every ethical system, and that real divergences only arise when we make the next step in advance. I should rather regard this Rationalistic terminology as somewhat foreign to Hedonism. I do not think that Miss Jones will find, in Sidgwick's Hedonistic predecessors, any such emphasis on Reason (however interpreted).[17]

A fuller sense of Sidgwick's basic notion can be gained by considering it in relation to the concept of ultimate goodness, a tangled area that has exercised many of the contributors to this volume.[18] Roughly put,

for Sidgwick, the same basic notion, as involving a requirement of rationality, figures in both rightness and goodness, though the former has to do with our active powers and the latter with the sentient side of our nature. Sidgwick wants to resist definitions of the good that simply reduce it to pleasure or desire; goodness is a comparative notion, not some quantum of pleasure, and at any rate it should be significant, not merely tautological, to say for example that pleasure (or, as Sidgwick eventually wants to claim, desirable consciousness) is the good. Ultimately, Sidgwick maintains that good "is what it is reasonable to seek to keep, or aim at getting; and Evil is what it is reasonable to seek to get rid of or avoid" (*GSM*, 331), and, more specifically, that ultimate good on the whole is "what one would desire if one's desires were in harmony with reason and one took oneself to have an equal concern for all existence" (*ME*, 112), though he allows that this a bit too baroque to advance as a piece of ordinary usage. Because judgments of good are comparative, they do not involve, as judgments of right do, a definite categorical dictate to do this or that or, as with "right," the suggestion that we are capable of this or that. Judgments of right decree that we do, and can do, the acts judged right. Right conduct, indeed, is the best conduct that is in our power. But conduct can have a certain goodness even if it is not right. Thus, in "the recognition of conduct as 'right' is involved an authoritative prescription to do it: but when we have judged conduct to be good, it is not yet clear that we ought to prefer this kind of good to all other good things: some standard for estimating the relative value of different 'goods' has still to be sought" (*ME*, 106). However, as one approximates what is genuinely ultimately good on the whole, the rational dictate to aim at it grows, melding, insofar as action is a possibility, into the notion of right. Schneewind provides a good summary:

> The concepts of goodness and rightness then represent differentiations of the demands of our own rationality as it applies to our sentient and our active powers. Seeing this helps give us a better understanding of what Sidgwick takes the basic indefinable notion of practical rationality to be. It is what is common to the notions of a reason to desire, a reason to seek or aim at, a reason to decide or choose, a reason to do; it does not involve an authoritative prescription to act where there is barely reason to desire something, or even where there is fairly strong reason, but only where there is stronger reason to desire one thing than to desire anything else, and that one thing is within our powers. At this point it becomes the through-and-through "ought" or "right" of definite dictates claiming to give authoritative guidance to our conduct. If any "metaethical" answer to the question of the nature of the object of moral judgements is implicit in Sidgwick's position, it is that moral judgements embody the fact that we are

reasonable beings who feel and act. In judging what is right or good, we are following out the implications of our rationality for the practical aspects of our nature.[19]

Thus, sometimes moral notions involve the constraints of reason on the active side of human nature, and sometimes they involve constraints of reason on the sentient or feeling side of human nature. But again, in either case there is, according to Sidgwick, no question that it is, at least prima facie, a plain, unvarnished demand of reason that is at stake, a reason to do or aim at something; ordinary language demonstrates the absurdity of supposing that two flatly contradictory moral judgments made by different persons could both be true, as they could be if they were merely matters of feeling, expressions of emotion, and so on.

As remarked, Sidgwick's account of ultimate good is scrutinized by many of the contributors to this volume. Thomas Christiano, in his challenging contribution, grapples with the problems posed by Sidgwick's strictures on ultimate good and by his arguments that in fact the best (though still highly problematic) candidate for ultimate good is a hedonistic one – namely, happiness, conceived as "Consciousness on the whole desirable" (*ME*, 397). Christiano's rational reconstruction of Sidgwick's arguments carefully plays down the intuitionist elements in Sidgwick's account. Relatedly, William Frankena, in his masterly essay, sheds further light on the question by considering how Sidgwick uses the notion of the good in distinguishing between modern and classical ethics. Sidgwick, broadly in line with many historical accounts of the development of ethical theory, held that modern ethics had been primarily inclined to take the (more jural) notion of right as fundamental, whereas classical thought focused primarily on a somewhat undifferentiated notion of the good, with important exceptions such as the Stoics, whom Sidgwick viewed as transitional to Christian ethics and on whom, along with the Sophists, he did some of his best historical work. T. H. Irwin's essay and Nicholas White's also insightfully bring out how Sidgwick's intuitionistic views on ultimate good, and his hedonistic interpretation of it, affected his view of moral theory and his construal (and in large part, dismissal) of classical thought.[20] Sidgwick's treatment of perfectionism, of Aristotelian virtue ethics, a view that he thought all too easily lapsed into vacuity and circularity, was also carefully (though sympathetically) scrutinized in two extremely important earlier articles by Frankena: "Sidgwick and the Dualism of Practical Reason" and "Concepts of Rational Action in the History of Ethics," which are complementary pieces to his essay in this volume.[21] Frankena, too, had

noted, in an early piece, the authoritative element in Sidgwick's account of "good" and argued that this would seem to mean that the good cannot be wholly reduced to a naturalistic definition in terms of the facts, actual or hypothetical, about desire.[22]

As Schneewind pithily remarks, on Sidgwick's way of doing moral philosophy "we are concerned with what it is reasonable to desire, to seek, and to do." However, it seems that Sidgwick does not actually have too much to say in this connection about how reason can be practical or, for that matter, about reason as such, though he obviously supposes that it involves both noninferential and inferential components, moves at higher levels of generality, and so on. Thus, "what little he says," Schneewind states, "he puts in commonplace terms." Calling moral judgments "dictates of reason" does not mean that they are "given by 'the dictation of reason' or obtained by conscious reasoning . . . but only that they bear the characteristic marks of judgments which are subject to rational support and critique. They can be contradicted, their truth or falsity is objective in the sense that what any one person thinks, if he thinks correctly, cannot be denied without error by others, and reasons for and against them can be given."[23]

It is striking, as Schneewind continues, with what easy assurance Sidgwick supposed that moral judgments can be fully rational. "Such confident rationalism seems to belong to the Victorian age, which, however troubled it may have been with religious doubt, does not appear to have been nearly as troubled as later periods by various forms of doubt about the reasonableness of morality."[24] In fact, as we shall see, it is arguable that the results of Sidgwick's inquiry contributed to the doubts of later periods to no small degree. Further reflections on the differences between Sidgwick and his more skeptical successors are given in John Deigh's article, which contains a wide-ranging, critical discussion of Sidgwick's view of practical reason and judgment as matters of objective truth, a discussion that certainly bears on the problems involved in judgments of both right and good.

Whatever weaknesses or obscurities may attend Sidgwick's notion of reason, it is fundamental to his work. As Schneewind states, "the central thought of the *Methods of Ethics* is that morality is the embodiment of the demands reason makes on practice under the conditions of human life, and that the problems of philosophical ethics are the problems of showing how practical reason is articulated into these demands."[25]

In line with the independence of moral theory, Sidgwick hoped that this account of ethical terms would be more or less neutral between different moral conceptions and would not prejudge the choice between them. The account of goodness in terms of intrinsic desirability, without

requiring any specific, actual desire, and the account of rightness as involving a rational directive to act, without specifying any particular dictate or reason, do make the analysis at least relatively formal, since the only halfway substantive point made is that rightness involves maximizing goodness. Moreover, on his view, it does not follow that right actions necessarily maximize good consequences, as opposed to some other form of goodness; he does not suppose that definitions can say much about how goodness or rightness is determined. His account, as we shall see, is not even meant to rule out egoism as a method of ethics.[26] Thus, though Sidgwick certainly places great stress on the importance of clarifying terms, the choice between substantive moral views is not to be settled, in any truly significant way, by definitional or linguisitic considerations.

A similar vindication of the autonomy or independence of ethics can be seen in Sidgwick's focus on "methods." It is unfortunately not altogether plain just what Sidgwick means by a "method" of ethics, or what is the difference between a method and a principle. Some, such as Singer, have argued that he gives no consistent definition of a method.[27] However, Schneewind, quoting Sidgwick's statement that a method is a rational procedure for determining what it is right to do, argues that

> a principle asserts that some property which acts may or may not possess is an ultimate reason for the rightness of acts. A method is a regular practice of using some property of acts as the property from whose presence or absence one infers that specific acts are or are not right. Since a principle says nothing about a procedure for reaching conclusions about the rightness of specific acts, and a method says nothing about the ultimate reason justifying the use of the property through which such conclusions are reached, each plainly requires the other.[28]

However, the relationship between a method and a principle with which Sidgwick is concerned is a direct, or logical one; the property appealed to by the method is not merely evidential or criterial but is the right-making property. Thus, if, say, the principle is that right acts are those which produce general happiness, the method must involve identifying the presence of that property, and not merely some indicator of it. On this point, and in the general concern with methods, the advantage of Sidgwick's approach is that it neutralizes many of the problems posed by factual disagreement over the specific contents of moral judgments or over general assumptions, perhaps religious, that would carry us outside of the domain of ethics. Thus, in dealing with methods, Schneewind observes, "we deal with the rational determinant of moral judgements which is, aside from the ultimate principles them-